

One Bad Night

Story: One Bad Night

Storylink: <https://www.fanfiction.net/s/9096156/1/>

Category: Lion King

Genre: Adventure/Romance

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Authorlink: <https://www.fanfiction.net/u/3365186/>

Last updated: 03/17/2013

Words: 12471

Rating: T

Status: Complete

Content: Chapter 1 to 7 of 7 chapters

Source: FanFiction.net

Summary: An old enemy causes chaos in the dreams of Simba and his friends...

Chapter 1: Chapter 1: Search for a Wizard

AN: No. You're not dreaming. I really am updating with another story so soon. But that's what you want, isn't it? More and more stories to enjoy. Naturally, I'm happy to provide.

One Bad Night

Chapter One: Search for a Wizard

It was late evening at Jowai Resort. The sun was slowly beginning to set over the purpling horizon, creating a quiet atmosphere to the forthcoming night. The inhabitants of the resort—Simba, Nala, Haiba, Zazu and Sarafina—hadn't been doing much in particular. It had been an incredibly peaceful day, considering the previous events that had occurred.

"How are the cuts, Haiba?" Nala asked, sat on her stomach on top of a large rock. She noticed that he was soaking his forepaws in the sparkling waters of the river. "Still painful?"

"Well, they're healing all right," Haiba replied, swishing his paws around in the water. "But... well, they're going to take some time to get back to normal. It's like everyone's been out to get me this week. First those creatures, then that tree—whatever's going to happen next? Hopefully death by kissing." He smiled. "That would be just fine."

"Nothing," Simba announced, strolling into the resort. "One big fat pile of *nothing*." Out of them all, Simba had been by far the busiest today. After all, he was on a mission: to restore the Pride Lands and get his rightful kingdom back. "None of the animals around here know anything about any wizards."

Yesterday, Simba, Nala and Haiba had been in the midst of quite an odd adventure. After crossing through the perils of the desert, followed by a dangerous traversal across a river, they finally came face to face with a golden eagle known as the Hermit of Hekima. According to the Roho—a mystical magic entity—he was supposed to be able to help them with their troubles.

However, things hadn't gone quite so well. A powerful magic spell seemed to surround the Pride Lands. This prevented anyone from tampering with it or discovering its origin. The hermit did provide Simba with a value lesson, though. He had been treating his friends far too rudely after the death of his parents. After all, it wasn't right; they were only trying to help him, and he kept throwing it back in their faces.

Thanks to the Hermit of Hekima, the only lead they had now was to find a wizard who might know something about the magical spell—but that was proving harder than they first thought.

"Darn it," Nala said, hitting the ground in frustration. "How hard is it to find a wizard around this place? There must be *one* out there somewhere, right? It's not like they're completely extinct."

"Oh, wizards like to keep themselves scarce," Haiba informed them, removing his forepaws from the water. He shook them dry. "I mean, could you imagine if someone forced them to use their magic for evil purposes?"

"I'm sure they can do that by themselves," Nala said. "I think we all know the damage that Hago caused."

"Yep—your father was evil, all right," Haiba said, causing Nala to give him an angry stare. She didn't particularly like it when any references to her evil sadistic father were made. It was a part of her past that she would much rather prefer to forget about completely. "One of the evillest lions I've ever seen."

"Yeah, yeah," Nala said, frowning. "Enough about that pathetic excuse for a father. What I'm saying is that there must be plenty of evil wizards out there who want to take over anyone and anything."

"You're probably right," Haiba agreed, "but there are none that we know of. I think you'd have to face facts that the only real wizard we know is Hago himself. But after Tama killed him last time, I somehow doubt that he'd be willing to help us out."

"He'd be willing to *destroy* us," Simba retorted, thinking of all the times Hago had tried to end all three of their lives. It had to be that lion's favourite pastime. He put a paw to his chin, a thoughtful expression on his face. "Hmm... I don't suppose Tama would know of any other wizards, would she? She is a wizard, too—sort of."

"If she ever gets the hang of her powers," said Nala. "But I don't think she's the type of cub who keeps a list of all the wizards in the world."

"Well, no one around here knows," Simba told them. "They all seem to like keeping themselves hidden."

"Think Zazu would know?" Haiba asked.

"I doubt it," Simba replied, "but it's worth a try. Hey, Zazu!"

Zazu was asleep on a nearby tree branch. Simba's yelling was loud enough to jolt him awake, though. He screamed, looking around frantically. "*What? What?*" His eyes locked fearfully onto Simba's. "Whatever's the matter, young master?"

"We've been wondering," Simba said. "Do you know if there are any wizards lying around the place?"

"I don't know anything about wizards," Zazu said. "Personally, I would rather prefer that you give up this fruitless quest. It's quite clear that there is no way to bring the Pride Lands back, so why don't we just forget all about and live here for the rest of eternity?"

"I thought you hated life in the jungle," Nala said, staring at him curiously. Why was he so desperate to stay all of a sudden?

"You're just scared that it might take a little bit of danger to get the kingdom back," Simba snapped. "I remember when you were at least a *little* bit brave. What the heck's happened to you lately?"

"You couldn't possibly understand," Zazu responded, turning away from the cub. None of them knew of his heartache, and there wasn't really much point in telling them, so he kept things to himself. "Now, leave me alone."

"Aw, who needs ya?" Simba said, before turning back to his friends. "Look, guys—we have to figure this out or we won't get anywhere. There aren't any wizards in the Grand Lands, are there, Haiba?"

"Nope," Haiba said. "Well, actually, there was that wildebeest who thought he could read minds by bashing his head against a rock. But then one day he cracked his skull and his brain fell out—so maybe not."

"Maybe not," Simba said, shaking his head. That was the thing with Haiba: he always seemed to think about something completely different to what you wanted him to. Sadly, it only seemed to make the situation seem more hopeless. Was there *anything* that they could do that would lead them to a wizard? "This is ridiculous—there has to be something."

"We could always bring Hago back to life," said Haiba.

The resort suddenly seemed to go silent. Simba and Nala were pretty sure that they heard some birds drop down dead nearby. Haiba had said something so evil that it chilled them both to the bone.

"*Bring... back... Hago*," Nala said, emphasising every word. "Haiba, there are very few sentences that should never be said. That was one of them. Please don't even *think* about saying it ever again."

"Yeah," Simba said. "You don't just joke about things like that. It's insane! It's horrible! It's—"

"—the only way," Haiba interrupted, looking deadly serious about his suggestion. "I know it sounds crazy, but think about it. Hago is *the* master of magic. No one knows anything better about it than him. If we could corner him—question him, somehow—then we might be able to figure out how to break the spell's hold over the Pride Lands."

"None of us know anything about resurrection," Simba said. "It's just a stupid idea that won't work."

"Tama knows resurrection," Haiba said. He looked completely convinced by his idea now. "If we could just ask her—"

"No," Nala interrupted sternly. It looked as though she was pained to hear such an awful thing. "We're not doing it. I don't want anything to do with that monster anymore. It feels like a nightmare that'll never end..."

The silence that followed was incredibly awkward. None of them really felt like saying anything after such an outlandish—yet strangely logical—suggestion. They all just sat there. Doing nothing.

"So... drink of water, anyone?" Simba said, finally speaking up.

"I thought you'd never ask," Nala said, before running away from the resort as fast as possible.

"Hey—but there's a river right here!" Haiba called after them.

"It's not good enough!" Nala shot back over her shoulder, as she and Simba seemed to run even faster.

Haiba let out a flat laugh. "Ha! I suppose that's what I get for suggestion something decent for once. If taking risks doesn't stretch out to resurrecting psychopathic wizards lions, then that makes us all cowards." He looked up at the night sky, illuminated now only by the bright full moon. "I guess I'd better get a drink, too."

He walked off briskly after Simba and Nala, knowing that it was going to take quite a lot of convincing to get them both to agree with his idea. It was crazy, but it just might work if done correctly.

If only there was some way to *make* them believe him...

Chapter 2: Chapter 2: Reflection of Evil

Chapter Two: Reflection of Evil

Simba, Nala and Haiba had retreated to another river outside the resort. Coincidentally, it was the same river that Sarafina liked to relax by. Of course, they were none the wiser as to what Hago had done to her there...

Staring at his reflection in the river, Simba wondered whether things would ever get better. It seemed as though they were embarking on a wild goose chase. Every clue they found seemed to lead to another clue, and that would lead to another, and then another and then another... It never ended. Maybe this was his destiny: to be forever searching for a way to restore his home... He felt doomed.

"Ha-ha. Doomed, eh?"

Simba's eyes snapped onto his reflection in the river. Only... it *wasn't* his reflection. He looked... older. He was an adult. A fully grown adult. But the mane was slightly different. The colour—it almost looked like blood. The eyes looked so cold and brown, too. It was though it were a completely different version of Simba.

And sadly, that could only mean one thing.

"No..."

"Hello, Simba."

"No!"

But it was there. Right in front of him. Simba was staring at the King of Dreams.

The King of Dreams was one of Simba's enemies from a long time ago. Due to an incident with some psychic pollen, the King of Dreams was spawned from Simba's dark side. He put Simba and his friends into a dream state and prevented them with a deadly choice: two different situations both with a deadly danger. One was real. The other was fake. They barely managed to scrape through the sinister challenge alive...

"You're gone," Simba said, shaking his head in disbelief. He couldn't believe it. "You died."

"I never die, Simba," the King of Dreams said, with a wave of his paw. "I only... fade away. I told you before: I prefer to stick to the shadows. You and I are quite similar, in that respect. After all, you are the one who keeps your feelings in the shadows. About your parents. About your *friends*..."

"Shut up," Simba said. "This isn't real. This is just—"

"—a dream?" said the King of Dreams, his smile widening. "Oh, I wish that were so. But the dreams are yet to come, Simba. That's when the fun begins."

"You're. Not. Real." Simba gritted his teeth at the evil King of Dreams, hoping that he would just 'fade away' for ever. "I know what happened. It was that psychic pollen. Made my dark side come out. Gave it a voice to use against us. You can't—"

"I think you'll find that I *can*, Simba," interrupted the King of Dreams. "Your dark side is just that. *Your dark side*. It's always there. Watching, *waiting*. To come out. To consume you. To take you over. You know that it makes sense."

"I wouldn't let you out in a million years," Simba snarled.

"Oh, the anger," said the King of Dreams, chuckling. "Of course. One step away from restoring to evil deeds. And then you'll let me out. It's inevitable. I know how you've been feeling, Simba. Abandoned. Forgotten. Lost. All because they died. You know this... *don't* you?"

Simba stood there, frozen. He wanted to move, but just couldn't. It was as though the King of Dreams had him nailed to the ground. Imprisoned for as long as he wanted. "The death of my parents has nothing to do with you."

"Don't make me laugh," said the King of Dreams, and then he laughed. "Oh, wait. You did."

"You won't ever take me over," Simba said. "I won't let you."

"Really?" asked the King of Dreams. "I think you'll find that you've been letting me out more and more in recent times. I'm

right, you know. The death of your parents has *everything* to do with me."

Simba blinked several times. It felt as though the King of Dreams was digging inside his head, ripping out information. He wanted to get rid of him. Destroy him for ever. Until there was nothing left.

The King of Dream's eyes seemed to glint with pleasure at seeing Simba struggle. "You can't hide from the truth," he told him. "I've been there for quite a long while now. Think back to the very moment Mufasa and Sarabi died. All that pain you felt. All that anger. You were releasing it. Releasing *me*."

"Shut up..." Simba said, his head pounding with fury. "Shut up..."

"And then you took your revenge," grinned the King of Dreams. "Planned and plotted to destroy the Vimelea. And then you did, didn't you?"

"They destroyed themselves," Simba said. It was the first thing he could think of. Anything to prove this horrible thing wrong.

"Oh, but you were so close to doing it yourself, weren't you?" the King of Dreams said. "The *true* extend of your dark side was out and about then. You could feel it, am I right? Your teeth around its throat... the blood... the *pleasure*..."

"I told you to shut up," Simba said, his face twisting in agony. *He's right*, Simba thought. *I used my dark side to try and kill them... He's right... He's right...*

"I can feel what you're thinking, Simba," the King of Dreams said with glee. "Every single thought in your head. You know I'm right. *You know*."

"No..." Simba said, shaking his head frantically. "No, no, no, no, no, no, no..." His brain was bubbling over, feeling every single memory of anger he'd ever experienced flashing through his head.

"And I've been trying to release myself ever since," the King of Dreams informed him. The vision of him in the water seemed to grow clearer. More formed. Almost *real*. "Through your depression. You're still experiencing the intense feelings of grief. And with grief, comes anger. That's how I'll get out, Simba. One day. It'll keep bubbling and bubbling and bubbling until... *pop!* I'm out."

Simba fell to his stomach, overcome by the visions of anger and fury coursing through his mind. He could feel the King of Dreams invading every part of his body. Trying to take him over. Once he fully submitted to his dark side, there was nothing he could do to resist... He wouldn't be Simba any longer. He would truly become the King of Dreams.

"Can you feel it, Simba?" asked the King of Dreams. "The anger? It's boiling inside of you. I can tell. You want to hurt me, don't you? But the only way of doing that is to release your anger. Go on. Unsheathe your claws and strike me down. Only then will you feel fully at peace. And only then can I finally manifest myself through you. Come on, Simba. *Destroy* me. *Kill* me. *Annihilate* me. Do it, cub! *Do it!*"

"*Shut up!*" Simba roared, his lungs almost bursting due to the insane volume. Once more, the jungle seemed to go instantly silent. Even the trees seemed to stop blowing in the light breeze.

"Simba!"

Simba blinked, and then the King of Dreams vanished from the river. He turned his head to see Nala and Haiba bounding over to him, looks of concern on both their faces. Evidently, they'd heard him yelling.

"Simba, what's going on?" Nala asked worriedly. "We heard you screaming at the top of your voice."

"Yeah—you almost shook the whole jungle," Haiba agreed, nodding his head. "What's up, huh? Did you realise you're going out with the wrong cub? I'm still available."

"He's here," Simba hissed, grabbing Nala roughly by the shoulders. He stared at her with wide, *wide* eyes. "He's coming for me. He wants to take me over!"

"Simba, what are you *doing*?" Nala exclaimed, pulling away from him in shock. "You're acting like Ugaidi! Have you lost your *mind*?"

Simba covered his eyes with both forepaws. "No... but it's true. He wants me. And he won't stop until he has what he wants. We didn't defeat him last time. We didn't finish the job! We should have killed him when we had the chance!"

"Simba, I'm not getting you," Nala told him. "What exactly is it that you're talking about?"

"The King of Dreams," Simba said, looking absolutely terrified. "He's inside me. Trying to get out. He wants my body!"

"The King of Dreams?" Nala said. "Simba, he's been gone for ages. You don't need to worry about him anymore. He—"

"He's back," Simba cut in, staring at her with true honesty and fear in his eyes. "He's back and he's coming for me. He's trying to make me unleash it. My dark side. That's what he is—that's how he's going to get out." He crumpled to the ground, close to tears from the terror he was experiencing. "I can feel him. Inside my head. And there's nothing we can do. We're doomed. *We're all doomed!*"

Thwack!

Nala watched in shock as Simba's eyes slammed shut and he fell unconscious. Haiba was stood behind him, wielding a rock. "I think that should keep him quiet for now," he said. "Why's he gone so insane?"

"You didn't have to do that," Nala said disapprovingly.

"Well, I did," Haiba said, staring at Simba's unconscious form. "I've never seen the guy so freaked out before."

"We'd better get him back to the resort," Nala said, picking him up gently and placing him over her back. "Maybe once he's had a good sleep things will become a little clearer."

Haiba let out a yawn. "Yeah," he said. "I should be getting some sleep, too... I'm kinda tired."

"Come to think of it, so am I," Nala agreed, finding herself yawning, too. "That's odd. I guess we're all feeling pretty sleepy tonight..."

Of course they were. Unbeknownst to them, the King of Dreams' deadly plan was already underway.

And he wouldn't rest until Simba was finally his.

AN: A lot of you seem to suspect that Hago might be returning in this story. Not *just* yet. Instead, you get the King of Dreams. Aha! Remember him? Of course you do. Looks like he has another sneaky scheme planned. Will it have something to do with dreams? Well, obviously. He doesn't have that name for nothing, you know!

Chapter 3: Chapter 3: The Proposition

AN: Just about managed to update today. These two chapters took a little bit more time than I expected. But that doesn't matter to you; it's all about reading more, am I right? Well, I am to please...

Greg M 94: It's only fair that Haiba got a good hit on Simba. The poor guy's been experiencing nothing but pain after being almost eaten by creatures and falling down chasms...

anonymous13: I didn't plan on Hago being Nala's father right from the start. That was something I came up with quite later on into the run of the series.

Chapter Three: The Proposition

"Ow..."

Simba rubbed the back of his head as his eyes flickered open, feeling a throbbing bump forming at the back. Either he'd been sleeping on a really sharp rock, or someone had deliberately knocked him out for some reason... He voted for the latter.

"What happened?" he wondered aloud, taking in his surroundings. His eyes widened in a mixture of both shock and disbelief. He was in the one place he never expected to see ever again. A place that he assumed was gone for ever...

The Pride Lands.

"But... I was... in the jungle," Simba said, shaking his head to check whether he was just hallucinating due to the bump on the head. But no matter how much he blinked or rubbed his eyes, his surroundings failed to change. He was staring at the sparkling waters of the waterhole, as though it had always been there. "This can't be... *real*."

But it was there. Tilting his head to the side, Simba noticed a tree. The tree where he first met Nala, such a long time ago. Slowly—as if afraid that everything would disappear around him—he walked over to it. Tenderly reaching out a paw, he stroked its trunk. Having been at this spot a million times over, it felt no different than it had before.

"I'm..." Simba stared at the tree, as realisation dawned upon him. "I'm *home*."

He whipped round, staring at the lush green fields that made up most of the beautiful kingdom. Nothing had changed. No destruction, no dead animals—nothing! Everything was fine! It was like nothing had ever happened!

But... *had* it really happened? That was the question. Simba thought long and hard. His memories of previous events before he woke up were very fuzzy, but mental images began to form in his head... He could just about remember what had happened.

He had just finished coming back from asking around if there were any wizards in the area... then he went to the river outside the resort... and then the King of Dreams showed up and—

The King of Dreams! It was as if those four words alone were enough to make his heart pound and throb with fear. The mere mention of his name drove Simba insane. Just the thought of what he was... *who* he was.

It's me, Simba thought, slowly beginning to feel vulnerable once more. *My dark side. He wants to come out. Take me over. But he can't... He just can't...*

Simba sank back against the tree, shuddering at the thought of his dark side finally consuming him. The King of Dreams was right: he was beginning to commit to evil deeds. Attempting to slaughter the Vimelea was only the start... What if he began to kill other animals, too? Those who he thought were lesser than him. He would go the same way as Aibu: eradicating those who he knew to be weak. The jungle—and every other pride that surrounded it—would be purged. Simba would turn on his friends—his only family now—and kill them all. He would become the grand master of the world. He would—

No. Simba shook his head for what felt like the millionth time, trying to have a more positive outlook on things.

And that was when the most outlandish idea of all occurred to him.

Was it all a dream? Simba wondered, thinking back to the destruction of the Pride Lands. Could it be possible that the kingdom hadn't really been destroyed at all? That it was just something he dreamed up? Maybe the Vimelea never came to earth... Maybe the Scavengers never tore apart Jowai Resort... Maybe Aibu never became evil and tried to exact his

revenge on them all... It was all just a fantasy. Fiction. Something from the wildest reaches of his imagination.

Simba stroked the trunk of the tree again. Something about it made him comfortable. Reassured him that maybe his theory was true. Nothing had happened to the Pride Lands, after all. Just a dream... Well, a nightmare, really. The most horrible nightmare he could ever imagine. Even worse than the constant ones that Hago used almost successfully in order to drive him mad...

Just a dream, Simba thought, suddenly feeling quite relaxed. All thoughts concerning the King of Dreams soon started to drain from his head. Everything began to feel much happier again. *Just a dream...*

His head seemed to clear. In fact, he forgot about the King of Dreams completely. All of the villains. He felt well again. At peace...

"Simba."

The King of Dreams was stood right in front of him.

"No!" Simba screamed, backing right up against the tree. He had him completely paralysed with fear. "No, no, no, no, no! Leave me alone! I want to stay here! You can't make me leave! You can't!"

"Oh, Simba, Simba, Simba..." The King of Dreams began to circle the tree, shaking his head, as if disappointed with him. "When will you ever learn? You can't have everything you want. Didn't the Hermit of Hekima teach you that?"

"Why won't you ever leave me alone?" Simba moaned, just wanting him to go away for ever. He had to be the most annoying enemy he'd ever encountered... Even Shocker wasn't this irritating! "Just go away..."

"You know I can't do that, Simba," said the King of Dreams. "I am a part of you. I *am* you. Just the more intelligent side. I'm that itch that you're just *aching* to relieve. One little scratch of your skin and I'll be free."

"I'll never give in to my dark side," Simba vowed, feeling more confident than he thought when he said it. "*Never*."

"Oh, but you will, Simba," said the King of Dreams, staring up at the blue cloudless afternoon sky. "I'm *sure* of it."

"I won't," Simba said defiantly. "I won't. Because I know that everything else before was just a dream. This is my home—and I'm *staying*. There's nothing you can do to stop me."

The King of Dreams laughed. Cruel unpleasant chuckles that grated on Simba's nerves and made him feel insignificant. As if he was stronger than him, somehow. Maybe he was...

"That's a very funny thing to hear, Simba," the King of Dreams told him, still shaking off the laugh. "Because I think I've come up with yet another tricky challenge for you to overcome. But then it's not really a challenge; it's more of a... *proposition*."

"What are you talking about?" Simba demanded, in no mood for any more of his pointless mind games. He'd made his choice. He wouldn't give in to his dark side. He wouldn't. Not ever.

"This world is another dream, Simba," the King of Dreams revealed. "And deep down, you know it. Of course you do. After all, we are the same. We are one. And we can merge, you and I. Merge together. Think of what we could create... or what we could *destroy*. We would be the most glorious life forms in existence. Isn't that what you want?"

"No," Simba said, determined to beat him. Like he did last time. And he would every time. He would drive the King of Dreams straight into the ground...

"No," repeated the King of Dreams. "Of course you don't. The good side of you is trying to overshadow me. But... this is a way out of this for both of us. And I think you know what, Simba." He grinned, tilting his head to the side. "*Don't* you?"

"I want you gone," Simba said, gritting his teeth at the King of Dreams. "I want you *dead*."

"I can never die," declared the King of Dreams. "Regardless of your hatred for your own personality, I shall present you with the choice." He gestured to the beauty of the Pride Lands with both forepaws. "This is the Pride Lands. A *fictional* version of the Pride Lands. You're dreaming right now, Simba."

"So?" Simba said, unfazed. "I'll just wake up."

The King of Dreams just smiled. "That's where the choice comes in," he said, facing him now. "What if... you *didn't* wake up?"

"Huh?" The unexpected question stunned Simba. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that I can help you, Simba," the King of Dreams explained. "If you wish, you can stay in this dream world for ever. Everything is as it should be. Your parents are in the den. Go on. Find them if you want. Anything is possible here."

Simba stared at the King of Dreams, sensing true honesty in his eyes. That was one trait that they shared in common: they both knew honesty when they saw it. Particularly in each other, considering they were the same animal.

"Everything's the same?"

"Yes," the King of Dreams said, enticing Simba. "Think about it, Simba. It'll be like going back to your old life. You can forget all about that misery with the Scavengers and Aibu and the Hermit of Hekima... Instead, you can stay here for ever. Never aging. Immortal. Happy for eternity."

Simba was taken in by this 'proposition' already. But... there were two sides to every bargain. He knew that. "So what's the deal?" he asked. "Go on. Answer me."

"Just one little thing..." the King of Dreams said. He pointed a claw firmly at Simba's chest.

"*You.*"

Chapter 4: Chapter 4: Deal or No Deal

Chapter Four: Deal or No Deal

Simba didn't understand. He could feel the bump at the back of his head throbbing with even worse pain due to the confusion. It was giving him a headache, too. The King of Dreams seemed to exist in a realm of perpetual puzzlement...

"What do you mean, 'you'?" Simba asked, getting the feeling that there was more to this deal than meets the eye. "As much as I hate to admit it, we're the same—remember? That's what you said."

"I am an ever growing aspect of your personality, Simba," the King of Dreams said. "In fact, I'm such an advanced part of you that I should be a different life form entirely. You could say that I've... *outgrown* you."

"You still haven't answered my question," Simba snarled, eyes boiling with fury. His claws slowly extended. He was going to slash this creep right across the throat if he didn't give him a straight answer!

"Don't bother trying to kill me," the King of Dreams said. He didn't even need to look to know that Simba had unsheathed his claws. "You'll only end up finishing yourself—and then that'll be the end of *both* of us."

"Then tell me," Simba said, straining to contain his anger. It was just so hard to resist killing him right there and then...

"More anger," said the King of Dreams. He sighed with a smile, as if absorbing Simba's fury. "That's good. I grow ever stronger with each passing second. But it's still not good enough. What I need, Simba, is not for me to take you over... but to *replace* you."

He watched Simba's unnerved expression, and continued with his deal. "Don't you understand yet? You can stay in this world, Simba. This imaginary world which I have created for you—but in return I want to have your body. In the *real* world. Then at last, I can be free."

Simba gasped at the true extent of the deal. He wanted to take over his body—so he could escape into the real world!

"No..." Simba shook his head. "I won't let you."

"You say that now," the King of Dreams said, "but soon you'll come to change your mind. Because I know you too well. I *am* you."

"I won't let you into the real world," Simba told him firmly. "You'll just cause chaos and destruction everywhere you go. All you want to do is destroy."

The King of Dreams raised his eyebrows in agreement. "So?" he then asked. "What does it matter?"

"What?" Simba narrowed his eyes at the King of Dreams. "You think I'm going to let you *kill innocent lives*?"

"Yes," replied the King of Dreams, "because you're *sick of that world*. I sense it. In your thoughts. All that achievement, all that success—and for what? The death of your parents and the total annihilation of your home. That sounds just peachy, doesn't it? *No*. Why go back to that world filled with misery and grievance when you can have unlimited peace and everlasting happiness? What is there for you in the real world? What do you have to go back to?"

"Nala," Simba said, without even thinking about it. "I have her to go back to. I'm not going to leave her. And I won't leave any of my friends, either."

"Well," said the King of Dreams, raising a paw, "that can be remedied."

Clapping his forepaws together, a sudden *whooshing* sound tore through the air. Before Simba had the chance to blink, Nala, Haiba, Zazu and Sarafina were all lying motionless on the ground in front of him.

"There you go," said the King of Dreams, a triumphant smirk on his face. "Your friends. They're asleep, too. In the same dream as you. For ever. *Now* are you happy?"

Simba stared at his friends, and slowly begun to realise that this was what he always wanted. The King of Dreams had lived up to his namesake: this was Simba's ultimate dream. To have his home and his parents and his friends all with him. Plus there was the added advantage of them never growing old and being happy for all eternity. It made perfect sense to agree to the deal...

"Admit it," the King of Dreams ordered. "This is your ultimate goal, Simba. And I've given it to you. You should be down on your knees, thanking me and asking why I shouldn't be a magical blue fairy that grants wishes."

Simba hung his head, in both defeat and shame. "You're right," he admitted, using two words that he never thought he would say to this villainous—yet clever—side of his personality. "This *is* what I've always wanted."

"I know," said the King of Dreams. "All I need is your agreement, Simba. Then I can have your body, and we'll *both* have what we want."

Simba just stared at him, his mind searching frantically for any reason to disagree to the deal. Anything that would make him want to go back to the real world...

But he just couldn't. The King of Dreams was right. From the very beginning. The real world was filled with nothing but depression and cruelty. This was his only chance to be truly happy...

"Simba," the King of Dreams said, extending a paw. "Eternal happiness in exchange for your body. Deal or no deal?"

Sighing, Simba shook his paw. "*Deal*."

A crack of thunder suddenly cut through the impeccable sky. The appealing white clouds suddenly morphed into bleak grey ones. Rain began to pour down, splattering against the earth and turning the grass slick and slippery. Lightning began to streak through the dismal storm.

And all the while this miserable metamorphosis occurred, the King of Dreams was laughing maniacally.

"What is this?" Simba yelled, looking around in horror. He stared at the King of Dreams. "*What have you done?*"

"I haven't done anything," the King of Dreams chuckled. "This is all *your* doing, Simba! It's all *your* fault!" He laughed again, staring up at the sky in delight. "You *fool*!" he shouted, looking down on Simba like he would a worthless bug that deserved to be squashed. "You should have examined the terms of our agreement more closely."

"You said I could be happy!" Simba retorted. "You said everything would be like it used to!"

"I forgot to mention this was for... a *limited period*," the King of Dreams said, grinning widely. "As soon as you accepted the deal, I knew that my world would change around you. I made it so. You aren't going to be happy. You're going to *pray for death*!"

"I'll stop you," Simba said, stepping towards him. "I don't know how—but I will! *I'll kill you once and for all!*"

The King of Dreams laughed long and hard in his face. "You can't do anything!"

"I may not be able to," Simba replied, "but my friends *will*. They'll see through you in an instant!"

"Not a chance," said the King of Dreams. "Your friends are here in this world of perpetual destruction I have spawned. Still dreaming. But I wouldn't worry about them getting hurt in here, Simba. They'll be dead soon, anyway."

"What?" Simba exclaimed, feeling intense winds blowing back his fur. The relentless rain pounded his surroundings, causing the King of Dreams to appear blurry and out of focus.

"In this world, feelings are everything," the King of Dreams said. "I took the liberty of infecting your friends with an imaginary advanced form of the Kulaani illness. It lies dormant for just two hours—before taking you out in a flash. If they die in the dream, then they die in the real world."

"But what if I die?" Simba asked, thinking that this was something the King of Dreams hadn't anticipated. "You'll die, too."

"Our agreement still stands, Simba," said the King of Dreams. "You are no longer attached to your body. It belongs to me now. Every physical aspect of you is *mine*. And there's nothing you can do about it."

The King of Dreams looked straight up, staring at the chaos and anarchy reigning supreme in the stormy sky. "At long last! I am free! Free to do as I please! I will wreak havoc across the world! Everyone will succumb to my powers! And once they are all asleep, I will become *supreme ruler of the dream world*!"

"No! No! No!" Simba leapt at the King of Dreams, determined to destroy him, whatever the consequences.

But he was gone in a flash. Simba landed in a heap of muddy water, unable to do anything but accept that the King of Dreams had finally succeeded. He had fallen right into his trap... How could he have been so stupid?

Simba hit the ground repeatedly in frustration. "*No! No! No! No! No!*"

"Simba!"

Simba looked up, despite his blurry vision, to see Nala standing over him. His friends—his friends who were going to die in two hours—were finally awake.

"What is going on?" Nala yelled, over the sound of the raging storm.

He just stared at her, unable to provide an answer. There was only one thing he knew now.

They were all doomed.

AN: What's the word? Cliffhanger! These were some tense, dramatic chapters, weren't they? It looks like Simba and the others are in pretty deep trouble. Has the King of Dreams finally succeeded? You'll have to wait and see, I'm afraid.

***Chapter 5*: Chapter 5: Into the Nightmare**

AN: Who's up for more? I sure am! Here's two more miserable chapters for you to enjoy.

kora22: It's going to get even more suspenseful. Believe me...

Haradion: I stumped you? Oh, yay! I like stumping people.

anonymous13: The King of Dreams was born to manipulate Simba. A character manipulating... himself, in a way. My villains can be very confusing, can't they? But they are some of the best.

Chapter Five: Into the Nightmare

As the nightmare world swirled all around them, Simba could only stare at Nala in stunned silence, utterly horrified at what he had done by making that deal with the King of Dreams. He had killed them. Killed them all. Their fate was sealed—they were doomed to die here, in this world filled with death and destruction.

"Simba!" Nala was screaming at him now, desperate to snap him out of his misery-induced trance. "What's happening?"

Simba opened his mouth to speak, but no words came out. At least, none that would prove to be very reassuring. He wanted to hold her, to tell her that everything was going to be okay. But then that would be lying.

"I'm sorry," Simba said, tears forming in his eyes, ashamed by his actions. "We're dead."

"*What?*" Nala exclaimed, not understanding. A gust of wind almost blew her to the ground, but she just about managed to sustain herself. "Simba, what are you talking about? You're not thinking straight!"

"He tricked me," Simba sobbed, clutching Nala to his chest. "He tricked me and it's all my fault. I've killed us all."

"Oh, that was some rough night," Haiba said, slowly rising to his paws. He looked around, feeling the rain lashing onto his face. "Whoa. Who turned up the storm?"

"It's too late," Simba moaned, crying into Nala's chest. "It's too late for all of us."

"Simba, you have to explain this to us," Nala urged, holding his face up he was staring into her eyes. "What did you do to make this happen? You have to tell us so we can *stop* it."

"I made a deal," Simba cried, looking like he had just killed four animals. In a way, he *had*. "I made a deal. With the King of Dreams. He tricked me."

"The King of Dreams..." Nala thought for a moment. "So you *were* telling the truth about him. He was coming for you."

"And he fooled me," Simba said. "He said... he said that we could be happy. He said he'd give us the Pride Lands back. And my parents. Only... it wouldn't be real. We would just be stuck in a dream, but it would be for ever. But I was stupid. I agreed to the deal, and then it turned into this. And then... and then..."

"And then what?" Nala asked, already shocked by this sudden revelation from Simba.

It broke Simba's heart to finish the rest of his explanation. "He's infected you with an imaginary version of the Kulaani illness," he said. "You're all going to die in two hours."

"Did someone say we're all gonna die in two hours?" Haiba asked, wandering over to the two. "I know the weather's a bit rough, but it's not *that* bad."

"If it's imaginary, then how can it hurt us?" Nala asked.

"If we die in the dream, we die in real life," Simba said. "Just like last time—remember?"

"You mean... we're all having the same dream?" Nala said, slowly catching on to the situation.

"*Again?*" Haiba exclaimed. His expression turned sour. "Oh, no. If we're all going to die in two hours, then that means I'll never be able to date anyone ever again! This is a disaster!"

"Shut up, Haiba," Nala snapped. "We have to think. How are we supposed to get out of this?"

"There *isn't* a way out," Simba told them. "It was all part of the deal. I gave the King of Dreams my body in return for this. This world of... of *misery*."

"You gave him your *body*?" Nala yelled, horrified that he would do such a thing for an evil villain like the King of Dreams. "Simba, how could you do such a thing? You must be a—" She stopped when she saw the broken look in his eyes.

"Well, it's only a bit of rain," Haiba said optimistically. "I mean, how on earth is that supposed to cause any harm?"

A bolt of lightning struck the ground right in front of Haiba, turning it a charred black colour. "Okay. So maybe it *is* harmful."

"We have to get to the King of Dreams," Nala said, taking over the role of leader, since Simba had regressed into a depressed wreck once more. "And get Simba his body back. Now, if you were the master of a deadly dream world, where would you hide?"

"He's not here," Simba sighed, sinking onto his back, lying in the messy mud. "He's gone. Into my body. Now, we're all just going to dream until all of us die. Well, all of *you*. I'll just keep on going, living in this world. Being tortured over and over again... *for ever*..."

"Well, there must be a way to escape a dream," Nala said. "Isn't there always? You know that expression. Pinch me—I'm dreaming? Maybe we could— *Ow!*" She looked down to see Haiba pinching her foreleg. "Haiba, what are you doing?"

"Pinching you," he replied. "You know—to see if it would wake you up."

"Well, it sure felt real to me," Nala said, rubbing the sore area. "If we're asleep, then it's going to take a lot more than pinching to wake us up. There has to be something else..."

"There *isn't* anything else," Simba groaned. "You may as well just kill yourselves now—before anything worse happens..."

"We're not going to kill ourselves, Simba," Nala told him sternly. "We're going to put our heads together and come up with a plan to stop the King of Dreams. We've been him once and we can do it again."

"Somehow, I doubt that," Haiba said, as another streak of lightning blasted the ground beside him. "I'm getting the feeling that this weather might be *aiming* at us..."

"Oh, great," Nala said, rolling her eyes. "So we're going to die in two hours—and the weather is also attacking us. Can it get any worse?"

Famous last words.

From out of the fog that surrounded most of the imaginary Pride Lands, a figure emerged. It was a sight so awful that Simba, Nala and Haiba felt like covering their eyes in disgust. They envied Zazu and Sarafina; they were lucky not to have woken up yet...

"Oh, I've waited a long time for this," said the figure. "And it's about time that I finally had my revenge."

Haiba let out a girly high-pitched scream, as he often did whenever he saw something that was truly terrifying.

They were staring at Froggy.

"Ha!" exclaimed the sinister frog. "Bet you're surprised to see me, huh?"

"But... how?" Nala asked, shaking her head in disbelief. "We thought we'd seen the last of your ugly face ages ago!"

"You did," said Froggy, "but only because of... recent circumstances."

"What's that supposed to mean, you slimy... slimeball?" Haiba asked.

"I was on the verge of death not too long ago," Froggy explained. "Crushed by a falling tree. But then the King of Dreams appeared to me. And we made a deal. He promised me eternal life in his dream world... but in return I had to rule over it. So I've been stuck here, waiting for the day when he would bring you to me. So I could destroy you, once and for all!"

"So you're stuck here," Nala said. "Just like us."

"I'm not stuck," Froggy declared. "I'm *staying*. For ever. You think I'd want to go back to that broken and busted body of mine? No. Here, I can be free. And rule over the world of chaos and destruction! Plus it gives me the chance to have my

revenge."

"Yet another revenge plot," Haiba sighed. "That's, what, the seventeenth one now?"

"And just how do you—a tiny, little frog—plan on destroying all of us?" Nala demanded, feeling rather unfazed by his threats.

"I am in control of this world," Froggy said. "My job is to destroy all of you—and that's what I'm gonna do. Now, would you prefer to be skewered, drowned or blown up? The choice is yours."

In a bout of rage, Simba leapt at the evil frog, only for him to disappear and then reappear right behind him. "You know, you're really going to have to try harder than that if you want to put up a good fight."

"Is there a reason a horrible storm is brewing all around us?" The three cubs whipped around to see that Zazu and Sarafina had woken up. "This is absolutely horrendous!"

"I've never seen such bad weather before," Sarafina said, struggling to get to her paws as the fierce winds held her down.

"You're all going to die," Froggy said, hopping around in glee. He began to sing a little song: "*You're all going to die... You're all going to die... You're all going to die...*"

"Shut up, you stupid maniac!" Nala yelled, in no mood for his irritating antics. They had to figure a way out of this horrid mess... "Froggy, you don't have to do this. We can help you—if you help us. We can get you your body back."

"My body is beyond repair," Froggy said. "All I want is for you to be destroyed. And I think I have just the way of doing it."

In a flash, Froggy was gone, and the ground beneath them began to rumble.

"What's happening?" Nala yelled, as the ground shook furiously underneath their feet.

From right in front of them, the ground suddenly burst open, and exactly ten disgusting-looking creatures leapt out from below. Their purple eyes instantly locked onto the cubs, and they bared their teeth in hunger.

"Oh, no," Haiba said, staring up at the creatures with wide eyes. "It's the creatures! The ones that ate Aibu!"

Chapter 6: Chapter 6: Sudden Death

Chapter Six: Sudden Death

"Does this nightmare ever end?" Haiba moaned.

"No," said Nala. "That's kind of the point."

"What on earth are those monstrous things?" Zazu cried, pointing at them with the tip of a shaky wing. "They're unlike any animal I've ever seen before!"

"That's because they're not animals," Simba said, staring at them. "They're just... *things*. We've met them before."

"Let's just slowly back away," Nala advised, doing just that. "Maybe they can't see us if we move very quietly."

The creatures growled at them, blatantly disproving Nala's theory. "Okay. So maybe not. Let's just run for our lives instead."

"Agreed," said Haiba.

Simba, Nala, Haiba and Sarafina all made a run for it, darting around the creatures and sprinting in a random direction. Zazu flew overhead, just as the creatures began to chase after them. "Where the heck are we going?" Nala yelled.

"I don't know," Haiba said. "I thought you knew."

"Quick! In here!" Nala dived through a small hole in the ground, which led straight into a cramped cave. It took quite some time for the others to squeeze in. Zazu was the last to fall through, as the creatures growled in rage at being denied their meal.

"Well, I can say these conditions are *sufficiently* better," Zazu said, examining the claustrophobic interior of the cave. "But it's still absolutely terrible. I think you'd better explain what's going on, Simba—this masochistic situation is obviously something to do with you."

"Zazu, in short: we're all trapped in a deadly dream, and we all have two hours to live," Nala explained briefly. "Got it?" He nodded. "Good. Now, keep that beak of yours shut." She turned to Simba. "Simba, you have to help us out," Nala said. "You said—the first time we met him—that the King of Dreams was like the bad part of you. Your dark side. That means that the two of you must be connected somehow. Doesn't that mean you know each other's weaknesses?"

"Yeah," Simba admitted, "but we made a deal. And now he's gone. He's not here. We can't defeat him if he's nowhere to be found."

"Forget about that," Nala said. "Just tell us what his weakness is."

"The same as mine," Simba replied. "Overconfidence. He thinks that he can beat us, no matter what."

"Good," Nala said. "Then that means we can exploit it."

"And just what is that supposed to mean?" Simba asked. All hope of ever getting out of this situation had been wrenched from his body. He just didn't see how they were going to outwit the King of Dreams. It seemed that this time, they had finally won.

"Think about it," Nala said. "If he's overconfident, then that means he always has a reason to come back."

"You think we can still bring him back here?" Haiba asked. "But would he do that?"

"To torture Simba even more," Nala explained. "It's Simba's dark side. Remember the last time we met him? All he did was playmind tricks on us. It's what he lives for."

"I think he's played enough mind tricks," Simba said with a miserable frown. "What's the point in playing any more? You've got just over an hour to live, anyway."

"You need to make him think he's *truly* won," Nala told him. "What if... what if we convinced him that you thought that you'd beaten him, somehow? Then he'd come back to prove you wrong. And then we can stop him."

"Now, how would you make him think that Simba's won?" Haiba wondered aloud.

"That's simple," Nala said. "We have to kill Froggy."

"Kill Froggy?" Haiba repeated. "That doesn't sound very nice."

"He's the ruler of this world," Nala said. "What if we convinced the King of Dreams that if we killed Froggy then he'd have no choice but to let us go?"

"Sounds like a decent enough plan," Simba said. "But where the heck would we even *find* Froggy? Last time we saw him, he disappeared into thin air."

"Pride Rock," Nala said. "He's the ruler of this world, right? If so, then that makes him a *king*. Where else would a king be than Pride Rock?"

"You've got this all worked out, haven't you?" Haiba asked.

"Of course," Nala said. "I think fast when I'm trouble."

"Then we have to get to Pride Rock, and kill Froggy," Simba said, slowly starting to see through the fog of doubt that clouded his mind. Maybe there *was* a way to stop the King of Dreams, after all... He felt glad that his friends had been brought into this mess with him. Had they not been there, he would have been doomed to suffer for all eternity...

"Ahem," Zazu spoke up, clearing his throat. "I would advise that we refrain from committing the act of murder while in this world of misery. Why don't we just stay here? It may be cramped, but at least we're safe from the monsters out there..."

"Zazu, you don't have to be such a coward all of the time," Nala told him. "I know you're upset about something; I just wish you'd tell us what it was."

"Cowardice is necessary for survival," Zazu said. "I've learned that now. It's best to just keep out of things. Stick to the shadows, where it's safe."

"Well, you can stay here if you want, but *we're* not," Nala declared. She poked her head through the hole in the cave ceiling. "I can't hear anything... I think the creatures are gone. I guess once their meal finds a good hiding place, they go in search of another one. Not much smarter than they are in real life."

"Thank goodness for that," said Sarafina. "I dread to think of how awful it would be to be eaten by those things."

"So, should we make a run for it?" Haiba asked, looking up through the hole. The rain was still pouring out from the sky; some of it had escaped into the cave, and they soon noticed that it was slowly filling up with rainwater... "We seem to be up to our ankles in this rain."

"Nowhere around here is safe," Nala said, as the rain slowly began to rise up around them. "Let's get out of here before we drown!"

They did just that, squeezing through the tiny opening one after another. They looked around the area, and noticed that it seemed even more chaotic than before. The lightning had clearly become more frequent since the storm began; they could see that several trees had caught fire, and it was those flames that were now raging across the fields of the kingdom.

"I think I can still see them," Haiba said, pointing into the distance with a claw. Several shadowy figures were gathered close to the waterhole. "Those creatures must be attracted to the flames. Should prove for a neat distraction while we make a run for Pride Rock."

"Okay," Simba said, nodding. "Let's go."

Simba, Nala, Haiba and Sarafina all ran at a leisurely pace in the direction of Pride Rock, hoping that the creatures wouldn't hear them and give chase once more.

"I think I'll just fly," Zazu said, nervously looking around the area. "The earth is far too wet for my liking." He spread his wings and took to the skies.

That was when the bolt of lightning struck.

Zazu fell to the ground with a *thump!* He was motionless.

"Zazu!" the others cried, rushing over to him in a panic.

"Zazu, are you all right?" Simba asked.

But the hornbill didn't reply. He lay there, unmoving. Looking absolutely lifeless.

It took them quite a few moments to discover that Zazu, the former royal advisor, was dead.

"Oh, no," Nala said, tears forming in her eyes. "Oh, no."

"He's gone," Simba sobbed, burying his head in Nala's shoulder.

"But he can't be dead," Sarafina said. "This is only supposed to be a dream, isn't it?"

"If you die in the dream," Haiba said, looking solemn, "then you die in real life."

"I don't believe it," Nala said, fighting back tears. "We should have been more careful. We should have... I don't know, kept a closer eye on him. How could we be so *stupid*?"

They looked down on the dead Zazu, feeling heartbroken. He was their friend. They loved him, and now he had been killed in an instant by this horrible world created by the King of Dreams. Not even the Kulaani illness seemed a good enough death for him...

"What do we do now?" Sarafina asked, worried. "What do we do?"

"We'll have to stick with the plan," Nala said, her voice sounding shaky. "Otherwise *all* of us will be dead." She lifted Simba's head up with a paw, fearing that he had gone insane due to all of the heartbreak he'd suffered today. "Simba... are you okay?"

Simba stared at her with bloodshot eyes. "Let's just get the hell out of here," he said. "I can't take any more of this. I just want to go."

Nala nodded, and together they walked away into the miserable storm, leaving the lifeless Zazu behind.

They couldn't bear to look back.

AN: I'll just leave you on that shocking cliffhanger, then...

Chapter 7: Chapter 7: The Real Deal

AN: I left you all on quite a cliffhanger—one of my most evillest yet—so I'm happy to provide you with the final chapter of this story.

anonymous13: Grr... I know I keep doing that thing with calling him either the Prince of Dreams or the King of Dreams. There's so many kings and princes that it's only inevitable that I would get confused. It is the King of Dreams, though. I've gone back and changed the mistake in earlier chapters now, so it should be okay. Thanks for spotting it.

Chapter Seven: The Real Deal

It was a sad and miserable climb back to the imaginary Pride Rock. The death of Zazu had a profound effect on them all. The death of a loved one is one of those things that no one can possibly comprehend. It changes them significantly. Of all of them, Simba knew that better than anyone else. He'd lost so much in his young life... and found nothing.

"Here we are," Nala said quietly, not really wanting to speak at all. "Pride Rock."

Through the mist, they could make out the famed rock structure. Whether their journey here had been a completely waste of time or a stroke of genius, they didn't know. But it was their only hope now. Their only chance to defeat the King of Dreams and finally wake up from this torrent of destruction.

"What do we do now?" Sarafina asked, trying to break through the wall of awkwardness that they themselves had created. "Just wait here?"

Simba shook his head. "Let's just say that we think we've beaten him," he sighed, his heart filled with sadness. "Maybe then he'll show up to gloat some more."

"And then what?" Sarafina asked.

"I don't know," Simba replied honestly, devoid of any ideas. "We'll just have to make it up as we go along—like we always do."

"That's comforting," Haiba mumbled sarcastically.

"All right—here goes nothing..." Simba cleared his throat, and affected his best courageous voice. He stared up at the sky in defiance. "Did you hear that, King of Dreams? We've beaten you! We've won! You can't hurt us from up here! Your world of dreams isn't as destructive as you think!"

He looked at the others, shrugging. "Well, that's it," he said. "I tried. I don't know whether he'll show up or—"

Suddenly, Simba was grabbed from behind. "What?" he yelled in surprise, turning around to see...

Nala. She was grabbing him tightly by the shoulders, staring at him with a fearsome look in her eyes. "Nala—what the heck are you *doing*?"

"I'd shut up if I were you," Nala snarled. Her eyes had a sinister red glow to them. "Don't say anything that might get you killed sooner."

"What are you *talking* about?" Simba asked, not understanding any of this.

"She said shut up," Haiba said, stepping in front of him. His eyes too were glowing red. "I'd listen to her."

"Haiba, tell me this is some sort of sick joke," Simba pleaded. "Tell me you're just trying to cheer me up or something—"

He was cut off with a big kick to the stomach, knocking the wind right out of him. Simba cried out in pain, almost crumpling to his knees. "Ow!" He winced, knowing that a nasty bruise was soon going to develop there. "What's going on? Please—just tell me."

Simba was once again attacked—but this time it was by Sarafina. She raked her claws across his chest, leaving painful-looking wounds that were bleeding lightly. He screamed in agony, trying to break free of Nala's grip. But he couldn't. She was as stubborn as a heavy boulder.

"Know your place, cub," Sarafina said threateningly

What is happening? Simba asked himself, resisting the urge to cry at how despairing things had gotten. *Why is everyone turning against me?*

"What's going on?" Simba demanded. *"I want you tell me what's going on!"*

An evil laugh rang through the air. Simba recognised it instantly as that of his dark side: the King of Dreams. At that moment, there was no one in the world he hated more than him. This was nothing more than pure cruelty.

The King of Dreams materialised in front of Simba, grinning triumphantly. "Aha! Victory at last!" he proclaimed, sticking both forepaws up in the air. "You're a fool, Simba. My 'deal' suckered you right in."

"What are you doing to me?" Simba asked, tears welling up in his eyes. "If you want to kill me, then go ahead. Kill me. But don't make me suffer like this. I can't take much more of it."

"Ah, but that's the point, you see, Simba," the King of Dreams told him. "My job is to tease and torment you until your mind breaks. That's why the deal wasn't even a deal at all. This is a pre-determined event. I planned it right from the start."

"What?" Simba was far too overcome with pain and sadness to think about what he had just told him.

"I knew what was going to happen," the King of Dreams revealed. "Zazu's death, you coming to Pride Rock; *everything*. You cannot escape from me. This is my world. The world in which I am in control of."

"Hey—I thought I was in control of it!" a whining voice protested.

Simba's eyelid shifted to below the King of Dreams as Froggy hopped into view. "You said that I would be in control of everything!"

"No, I just *said* that you would," the King of Dreams retorted, looking down on the frog. "Just because I say something doesn't make it true. Maybe one day you should learn the art of lying. In reality, I've been controlling all of your actions all along."

Froggy looked incredibly offended. "You can't do that to me! *I'm* the one who controls people around here!"

"You are nothing more than a tiny amphibian," the King of Dreams said. "And now that you have served your purpose, I think it's about time that you finally met your fate."

Froggy seemed to shudder in fear. "Oh, no—you wouldn't *kill* me, surely? After all, it's a lovely day: stormy clouds, bolts of lightning. It'd dampen the mood if you were to destroy me like the tiny thing that I am."

The King of Dreams frowned. "You have much to learn."

And with that, he plucked Froggy up with one paw and hurled him off the edge of Pride Rock. He tumbled away into one of the fires raging through the fictional Pride Lands, gone in an instant.

"There's one problem taken care of," he said, before turning back to Simba. "Now, where were we? Oh, yes—I was just telling you of my ingenious plan. As I said, this was all planned right from the start. I knew that you would come here in order to draw me out. Your friends made it so."

"And we were very good at it, weren't we, Mr King of Dreams?" Nala asked, staring at him like an obedient slave.

"Very good indeed," the King of Dreams said with a smile. "You see, Simba, you friends are under my influence. They are in my power. They always were—right from the start, in fact. All for the purpose of keeping us here so we could have our meeting. You could say this is our... final battle, so to speak."

"So spit it out," Simba said, in no mood to ask questions or argue against him. He just wanted to die and get things over with. That was obviously why he was here. "Tell me what you want."

"I can't get into your body without killing your soul," the King of Dreams said. "The deal scenario was simply invented to bring you to this point. As of now, you are still in your body—but trapped in a deep sleep. I can only have your body if I kill you right here and right now."

"Why didn't you just kill me earlier?" Simba asked.

"I play mind games, Simba," the King of Dreams explained. "You know this. The whole point of this fictional world was to destroy your fighting spirit. The death of Zazu has come a long way in doing that. And now, once I kill you, I will inhabit your body with your friends at my side. They will help me in putting the whole world to sleep. I will rule over the world of

dreams as its eternal master."

"Then do it," Simba demanded, offering his throat up to the King of Dreams for him to slash open. "Kill me."

"However, since we are both part of each other, I feel that it is only necessary to offer you a sporting chance," the King of Dreams said. "So here it is: kill your friends and you escape. You'll go back to the real world alone. With no one to help you." He grinned. "What's it going to be?"

"Yeah—what's it going to be, *Simba*?" Nala taunted, staring at him with a cruel look in her eyes. "You really wouldn't kill your friends—*would* you?"

Simba stared into her red eyes, expressionless.

Then he spoke.

"No," he said. "But you're not my friends."

And he slashed Nala right across the throat.

She collapsed to the ground, lying in her own blood as she died. Simba moved swiftly over to Haiba, and he was the next to fall, his throat swiftly slit. Sarafina made a move to pounce at him, but he dispatched of her before she could even react.

Simba stared blankly at the now stunned King of Dreams.

"There," Simba said, no trace of victory whatsoever in his voice. "Now wake me up."

"No," the King of Dreams said, looking horrified. He recoiled, as if pained to see Simba succeed. "You can't do this to me. You could never kill your friends!"

"They're not real," Simba said, having figured it all out. "This is all just one big trap, set up by you to kill me. But I won't fall for it. Because I know now. *I'm* the one who's in control of my dark side. I don't need someone else to control it *for* me! I don't need you! You're *dead*! Do you hear me? *Dead!*"

The King of Dreams opened his jaws wide and let out a deafening scream of agony, as he slowly faded away into nothingness.

He was gone for good.

"Simba!" Nala cried, shaking him by the shoulders. "Simba—wake up!"

Simba's eyes flickered open, as his eyes slowly adjusted to his surroundings. Morning sunlight shone down on him. He was back in Jowai Resort. Safe and sound. Unharméd. "Huh?"

"You were trembling in your sleep," Nala explained. "It looked like you were having some kind of horrible dream."

Simba's memories of his encounter with the King of Dreams came rushing back to him. Upon remembering, he threw his forepaws around Nala and hugged her as tightly as he possibly could. "You're safe! You're all safe!"

"Uh... yeah," Nala said, laughing slightly. "I guess so. What the heck's up with you today?"

"Nothing," Simba said, smiling warmly at her. "I think I just managed to get rid of my dark side." He hopped to his paws, jumping around happily. "Yippee! I did it! I did it!"

Haiba joined Nala by her side. "What's up?"

"Just look," Nala said, pointing to Simba. He was skipping and hopping, running off into the distance.

Haiba watched Simba, raising an eyebrow. "What a very strange friend I have."

"I simply cannot believe that you still persist in bring up this argument!" Zazu yelled, staring at Sarafina with a furious expression. "This is my favourite tree, and if I wish to sleep here, then I wish to sleep here!"

"Oh, don't be such a grouch," Sarafina said. "You sleep at the top of the tree while I sleep at the bottom. It doesn't matter

in the slightest."

"That's not the point!" Zazu exclaimed. "This is a matter of privacy!"

"Zazu!" Simba shouted ecstatically, grabbing the hornbill in a tight hug. "You're okay! You're not dead!"

"It would appear so from the amount of pain I'm in," Zazu choked, almost crushed from the hug.

"I'm never going to criticise your personality ever again!" Simba told Zazu, before dropping him to the ground. "See ya later!" With that, he vanished off once more.

"What on earth was *that* about?" Sarafina said in bemusement.

"Either Simba's had some sort of incredible emotional victory or he's lost his mind," Zazu decided, brushing dirt from his chest as he got to his feet. "I would vote for the latter."

The two watched as Simba disappeared, still hopping and jumping about the place triumphantly.

But the former Prince of the Pride Lands didn't care about that. For the King of Dreams was dead, and everything was all right.

The End

AN: Yay! The King of Dreams is gone and Zazu isn't dead! Bet you're all relieved to hear that, aren't you? Wow—that was a really confusing story, wasn't it? So many twists and turns from that horrible villain. But now he's dead, so we can all rejoice and enjoy invisible chocolate cake. With a nice tall glass of milk. Goes so well with chocolate, doesn't it?

Still, the story coming up next will be one of the best yet. I'm really looking forward to it, and I think you know why...

NEXT TIME: The Interceptor corners Simba... and he's asking for help?